

## CHAPTER III.

## MAJOR JOHN R. COONS.

## THE MEASURE OF THE MAN.

In the "History of Grant County", published by the Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1881, under the title

"Some of Grant County's Illustrious Dead"

appears a sketch of the life of Major John R. Coons. The article is written by J. W. Seaton, who came to Potosi, Wisconsin, in 1847; and who was a contemporary of Major Coons. To the contents of this article, written April 16, 1879 and published in a series entitled "Sketches of the Mines," the Coons family is deeply indebted for extant information concerning this illustrious ancestor.

Of Major Coons, Seaton wrote in the article referred to:

"Major John R. Coons \* \* \* derived his patent of nobility from the hand of nature. He hailed from the 'Blue Grass' state. \* \* \* His gentlemanly bearing—his pleasing conversation—his generous nature and abiding friendship—bespoke the true Kentuckian—and the truer man \* \* \* he became an adept in penmanship, a good calculator, and stored his mind with useful reading."

The French language Major Coons spoke with the "glibness and familiarity of his mother tongue."

He was no common adventurer, but a true pioneer. He had a strong constitution and a will to encounter and overcome all difficulties.

## THE LIFE OF JOHN R. COONS.

John R. Coons was born June 24, 1800 in Lexington, Kentucky. He is believed to have been the son of Henry Coons (Joseph, Jacob,—see chapter 1) and Mary Ann Allen. He had a sister, Susan; and brothers, Martin and William.

At the time of his birth Kentucky had been a member of the Union for eight years, and was a thriving and growing commonwealth. The victorious march of General "Mad" Anthony Wayne, with his United States regulars and Kentucky volunteers from Cincinnati to Lake Erie, culminating in the Indian's last stand at Fallen Timbers, August 20, 1794, put to an end forty years of warfare against the Northwest Indians. The treaty of Greenville in 1795, following this victory, brought security and quiet for fifteen years.

It was during this period that Major Coons, still a child of tender years, came to St. Louis in 1808. St. Louis, as part of the Territory of Louisiana, had been recently acquired by Jefferson's purchase. It was a small French village. Traders, trappers, hunters, and Creole girls constituted the bulk of the inhabitants. The village was then becoming one of the principal fur markets of the United States. The American Fur Company established itself at this strategic point of water communication via the Mississippi and Missouri with a vast hinterland. Of this firm the Major became a trusted employee.

On New Year's Eve in 1810 there also arrived in St. Louis, John Bradbury, destined to be the father-in-law of ten year old John. Bradbury had left in England a family, which he mentions frequently in his "Travels". Among the family were a son, old enough to correspond with his father on money matters; and a daughter, born in Macclesfield, England, November 25, 1800. After the War of 1812, Bradbury returned to England, published his book, and in 1819 was a permanent resident with his family in St. Louis.

Within two years John Coons and Sarah Bradbury were married. The marriage took place on August 30, 1821. Bradbury was a man of distinction and importance. He was a friend of the Governor; of the deputy attorney-general,

Brackenridge; of Wilson P. Hunt, the first postmaster of St. Louis, and a resident partner of the American Fur Company; and of Albert Gallatin. To court and win the daughter of such a man, young John was either of equal standing or a man "to overcome all difficulties", as he is described by Seaton.

To this union were born ten children.\* Of seven of them, nothing is known, save that two were unnamed and probably died in infancy. The record of the births appears in Sarah Bradbury's Bible. Each of the unnamed children was one of two pair of twins, born twelve years apart.

The flyleaves of Sarah's Bible disclose the following:

"Sarah B. Coons.

John R. Coons & Sarah Bradbury was married August 30th, 1821.

John B. Coons & Sister was born August 28th, 1822.

John Wm. Coons was born August 21st, 1824.

Elizabeth Coons was born March 11th, 1826.

Henry B. Coons was born January 30th, 1829.

Samuel Berry Coons was born March 19th, 1831.

Sarah Coons was born July 10th, 1833.

Marie Louisa & Brother was born July 12th, 1834.

Eliza Coons was born January 16th, 1836.

John R. Coons born June 24, 1800, Lexington, Ky.

Died July 25, 1852.

Sarah Bradbury born November 25, 1800.

Macclesfield England.

Died March 18, 1851."

Four children had been born when, in 1827, the father was sent to the Upper Lead Mines, as the Wisconsin lead region was called to distinguish from the Missouri lead mines, and assigned a clerkship with Gratiot, Chouteau & Co., a famous St. Louis trading house which had recently

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\* Sarah's Bible so records. Aunt Eva Calloley mentions an unrecorded set of twins who died at birth—so related to her by mother, Eliza, child of Sarah. It is also a tradition that before marriage Sarah dreamed that while washing twelve hose at the river bank, all but three floated away. This dream she later interpreted as a prophecy that she would bear twelve children, only three of whom would live.

established a branch at Gratiot's Grove in what is now La-Fayette County. The business of the firm was smelting lead, selling equipment and provisions, and trading with the Indians for furs.

A truly accurate and complete account of the lives of the pioneers, John and Sarah, requires a digression into the fascinating history of the Upper Lead Region.

### The Upper Lead Mining Region.

In a search for the Orient via the west, Jean Nicollet in 1634 discovered Wisconsin and claimed it for the king of France. Though no Spaniard had ever seen Wisconsin, the Spanish laid claim to the Mississippi valley from the voyage of De Soto in 1541 on the lower Mississippi. What now constitutes Grant and Iowa counties was first seen by white man in 1673 when Marquette, carrying the cross of Christ, and Joliet, armed with the flag of France, descended the Wisconsin River to its mouth and proceeded southward on the Mississippi to the "Illinois Country."

The first explorer of the Upper Lead region was Le Sueur, accompanied by his reporter, Perricaut. Under commission and permission from the French King, these men and their followers went up the Riviere a la Mine\* marking sites of Indian mines. At the mouth of the Grant River a stop was made to purchase lead from the Indians for bullets. This, the first visit of white man to Potosi, was in 1700.

Copper was the object of Le Sueur's search. That lead was available in this region at the corner of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa was already known. Since as early as 1690, lead obtained from La Pointe\*\* by the Indians was

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\* Since called successively Fever River and Galena River.

\*\* The triangular piece of land between the Galena and Mississippi Rivers.

an article of traffic with the French traders at Peoria. Indeed there is evidence that Perrot, who had a fur trading post at the mouth of the Wisconsin as early as 1685 or 1687, was mining east of Dubuque prior to the journeys of Le Sueur.

To a small extent between 1723 and 1745 the French, with crown consent, worked outcroppings. From the time the English took possession in 1760 until the United States granted mining leases to lead miners beginning in 1823, the Indians were essentially the sole diggers. However in 1788 Julien Dubuque at an Indian council at Prairie du Chien was given permission to work the lead mines. He had explored the lead region two years previously. His activities were principally on the west side of the river, then owned by Spain. He neglected to perfect his title with the Spanish Crown, with the result that after the purchase of "Louisiana" from France in 1803, that territory having in the meantime been transferred from Spain to France, Dubuque's heirs and assigns were dispossessed. But from 1788 to 1810 Dubuque was buying, digging, and smelting lead.

In the Treaty of 1783 England surrendered to the United States all claim of the territory of the lead region east of the Mississippi. It was not until 1816 however that the United States took formal and permanent possession at Prairie du Chien, which had been captured by the British during the War of 1812. In 1821 Fort Crawford was built at Prairie du Chien, and the control of mines was given to the War Department. These two events marked the real beginning of the lead mining industry in Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa.

By treaties with the various tribes of Indians in 1804, 1816, 1817, 1826, 1828, 1829, 1831, and 1832 the United States claimed title to the lands of the lead region. This

was disputed by the Winnebagoes in 1827-1828 and by the Sauks and Foxes in 1831-32, which disputes add color to this story of the pioneer John and Sarah, to whom we now more directly return.

#### **First Settlers in the Lead Region.**

In 1822 James Johnson of Kentucky obtained a lease from the Indians to dig for lead with negro slaves. He found desultory mining already in progress. Ancient shallow diggings were found and also crude furnaces made by digging pits in hill slopes. Jesse Shull was already in Galena by special favor of the Sauk and Fox. Likewise Van Meter and Muir, who had Indian wives. Johnson established a military guard and immediately systemized the mining operations. This was the start of large scale mining in the Galena area.

In 1825 the brothers Henry and J. P. B. Gratiot, sons of the Gratiot of the trading house of Chouteau and Gratiot in St. Louis, left St. Louis by horse and wagon for the lead region of the Upper Mississippi. They journeyed by way of Peoria and Dixon's Ferry. In 1826 they sent for their families, who came by boat up the Mississippi and Galena rivers, and thence overland to Gratiot's Grove. The trip took sixty days.

Gratiot's Grove had been established by the Gratiot brothers as a mining and trading center about fifteen miles northeast of Galena. Before the end of 1826 six log smelting furnaces were in operation and sixty French and Indians were employed. A school was opened in 1828. When the land was surveyed early in 1833, it was found that township 1 north, range 2 east contained three settlements, — Gratiot's Grove, Shullsburg, and White Oak Springs. The two former prior to this time had upwards of forty families each.

A roving contributor of the New York "Tribune" who made an early visit to Gratiot's Grove, thus describes the locality:

"In all my travels in the West, I have not seen a section of country combining so many advantages with so much mineral and agricultural wealth, and so well watered and timbered, as the country around Gratiot's Grove. Nature never spread out a fairer and nobler field for the enterprising genius of man. The great natural beauty of the country, with its shady groves, its high rolling prairies, and its rippling streams; the fertility of the soil, the richness of the mines and the salubrity of the climate, cannot be surpassed."

The country abounded with game, particularly deer. Grouse, ducks, geese and other fowl were plentiful. The streams were clear and plentiful with trout and bass.

It was to this community that John and Sarah came in 1827. Four children had already been born to them. Of these four, John B., unnamed twin sister, John Wm., and Elizabeth, nothing is known. It is likely that the trip from St. Louis was made by boat to Galena, thence overland to Gratiot's Grove, where a lively village was growing up around the furnaces and store of the Gratiots. John had been sent as clerk for the Gratiots from the fathering establishment in St. Louis. J. P. B. Gratiot was apparently primarily interested in the mining. Henry Gratiot was government agent for the Winnebagoes and a man of much public spirit. His activities were such that it may be assumed safely that much of the actual running of the business of the trading post was intrusted to John R. Coons.

The population grew by leaps and bounds. In the entire Galena River country there were only 150 people at the first of 1826. By the middle of the year the population had tripled. By 1827 the lead output of the Upper Mississippi was exceeding that of the Missouri mines.

The culture of the region was largely confined to Gra-

tiot's Grove. The Gratiot brothers were well educated. They spoke English and French fluently, as did their trusted employee, John R. Coons. Henry Gratiot's wife was Susan Hempstead of Connecticut; and the wife of brother Beon (as J. P. B. Gratiot was called) had fled France during the Revolution, her mother being a lady-in-waiting to the unfortunate Marie Antoinette. Caleb Atwater, Indian Commissioner, who visited the Grove in 1831, wrote as follows:

“About twenty families reside in this secluded grove. Among the interesting people here are Mrs. Henry Gratiot, who was born and educated in New London, Connecticut; Mrs. J. P. B. Gratiot who was born and educated in Paris; and Mrs. John R. Coonce (Coons), who is a daughter of the celebrated English botanist, John Bradbury, who was born and educated in London. They all live within a few rods of each other. \* \* \* There is a post-office here, and mail passes through the place once a week, to and from Galena. Mr. Gratiot has large lead furnaces here; and there is a dry-goods store, but no doggery in the village.”

The fun of the village consisted in surprise parties in the winter, dances, and sleigh rides to Galena.

In 1827 the peace of the region was threatened by the Winnebagoes who claimed to have been ignored when the land was purchased from other tribes. But Colonel Henry Gratiot had had the foresight not only to secure a mining lease from the United States, but also from the Winnebagoes, for whom he was agent. Nevertheless the miners of lead region organized a company of over one hundred volunteers, who chose Col. Henry Dodge as their commander.

Frivolity was in the air on July 4, 1827. Adèle Gratiot, wife of J. P. B. Gratiot, was entertaining. As she was carrying a bowl of custard to the table, she saw four Indians with guns in hand coming to the house. In her surprise

the bowl fell from her hands. The Indians proved to be friendly Winnebago chiefs who had come to warn their friends, the Gratiots, that the young braves of the tribe were on the warpath because of encroachments on their lands; and that they, the chiefs, considered it unsafe for the women and children to stay at the Grove. Immediately the men set to work to enlarge and strengthen the stockade. The women and children, under guard, were sent by horse and wagon to Galena where block houses, standing on the heights overlooking the town, safeguarded against the Indians.

No attack of consequence was made south of the Wisconsin River; the Winnebagoes soon were defeated; and ceded their claims to the lead lands.

Many of the miners had fled the country during the Winnebago war. The murder and scalping of women and children was too realistic to be faced by any except the staunchest hearts. The termination of the war brought a temporary restoration of peace and a renewed influx of miners. In 1828 consternation struck again. To the little settlement at Gratiot's grove, it gave more fear than the trouble of the previous year. For this time the Winnebagoes massed at the Plattville Mounds, less than fifteen miles distant. Here several score of young braves, less amenable to the influence of Colonel Gratiot than their fathers, gathered to make war. They were quickly dispersed, however. Again trouble was temporarily over; peace was restored until the occurrence of the Black Hawk war in 1832. Locally the disturbance of 1828 is spoken of as the "Winnebago Fuss". In July of 1829 a permanent peace treaty was secured with the Winnebagoes at Prairie du Chien. From then on mining activities spread north to Mineral Point and Dodgeville.

Meanwhile John and Sarah Coons continued to reside

near the Gratiots in a log house a story and a half high. During the latter uprising of the Indians, their apprehension must have been real indeed, for Sarah was soon to be the mother of Henry B. Coons, born January 30, 1829. The next child, Samuel Berry Coons, was born March 19, 1831.\* For this confinement the mother journeyed to the home of her parents in St. Louis. The Sauk and Fox of west of the Mississippi were exhibiting unrest. This circumstance plus the lack of proper care in a pioneer community, properly persuaded the mother to visit St. Louis for the event ahead.

#### The Black Hawk War.

It is not the purpose of this narrative to recite the causes or detail the battles and atrocities of the War of 1832 with the Sauk and Fox, lead by Black Hawk. These Indians, who for many years had dwelt largely west of the Mississippi, contended that the Treaty of 1804 at St. Louis had been obtained from them by false promises; that the whites had not lived up to their obligations in the compact; and that the Indian braves who signed the treaty were not authorized by the tribes of the Sauk and Fox. In 1830 Black Hawk and his band crossed the river and journeyed by the great Sauk trail (which may still be observed south of Chicago) to consult with the British in Canada near Detroit. He was confirmed in his convictions and told that the government of the United States would assist him in repelling squatters from the old hunting grounds and village of the combined tribe east of the river.

Thus encouraged, Black Hawk returned to his village in the early spring of 1831 and threatened force. It was then that the discreet Sarah went to St. Louis. Through friendly Winnebagoes Colonel Cratiot was kept advised of the Indian temper. The Illinois militia, called out by

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\* A newspaper obituary of Samuel Berry Coons gives his birth date as March 5. The 19th is recorded in his mother's Bible, however.

Governor Reynolds, drove the "British band of Black Hawk" across the river, where the Indians humbly promised to remain.

In the spring of 1832, however, the band was on the war-path. On April 6, the band crossed the Mississippi, sought the help of the Winnebagoes and Chippewas, and attacked outlying farms and settlements. The news of the invasion spread like wildfire through the mining region. Colonel Henry Dodge, then commandant of Michigan (of which Wisconsin was then a part) militia west of Lake Michigan raised a battalion of two hundred volunteers from the lead region. This command of mounted rangers was joined by John R. Coons. He enrolled in the company of Captain James Stephenson of Galena on May 19.\*

It was a picturesque contingent that Colonel Dodge offered as reinforcement of the United States regulars. Dodge was a soldier, sheriff, and miner from Missouri. He was a typical frontiersman of the better class, and a personal friend of the Gratiots. To the Indians he was known as "Hairy Face". In 1832 he dwelt and mined south of Dodgeville. His troops were of similar bearing. They are vividly described by Thwaites in "Wisconsin":

"Dodge's rangers, gathered from the mines and fields, were a free and easy set of fellows, destitute of uniforms, but imbued with the spirit of adventure and the customary frontiersman's intense hatred of the Indians whom they had ruthlessly displaced. While disciplined to the extent of obeying orders whenever sent into the teeth of danger, these Rough Riders of 1832 swung through the country with small regard for the rules of the manual, and presented a striking contrast to the habits and appearance of the regulars."

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\* This company was known as the Galena Mounted Riflemen. It was an independent company attached to the command of Colonel Dodge. The roll of the company included many from Wisconsin, including Jesse Shull, the founder of Shullsburg, for it was commonly believed until the base line boundary was established by survey in 1833 that the most southerly lead towns in Wisconsin were in Illinois. Hence the roster of Captain Stephenson's company, found in the Adjutant General's reports from Illinois, includes many Wisconsin pioneers.

Yet it was this band of rangers that not only protected the lead region from serious assault; but was largely responsible for the ultimate defeat of Black Hawk in August 1832 on the Bad Axe River.

News of the Sauk invasion quickly reached Gratiot's Grove. Forts and stockades were built throughout the lead region: Fort Hamilton at Wiota, Fort Defiance in Willow Springs south of Mineral Point; Fort Union at the residence of Colonel Dodge south of the present Dodgeville; Fort Jackson at Mineral Point; Mound Fort at Blue Mounds; Blockhouse south of Platteville; and others. Because Colonel Gratiot was friendly with the Winnebagoes, perhaps his community was not sufficiently alarmed. But the bloody attack at Apple River Fort near the present village of Elizabeth, about twenty miles south; and the massacre at Spafford's Ford about fifteen miles east caused the women and children to seek a place of greater security at Galena.

Fervent hatred of the Indian and anxiety for his family must have mingled in the thoughts of John R. Coons when he saw his wife and children driven from their home by fear of a ruthless and savage enemy. Neither Henry B. Coons, then age three and a half years, nor his brother Samuel, age one and a half, was old enough to remember the incident. If the older brothers and sister were alive, they were at an age when war would impress its incidents upon them for life.

Seaton relates that after the departure of the women and children for Galena, the Coons house, being strongly built, was converted into a place of defense and garrisoned with soldiers.

One incident of the Black Hawk war requires special mention because of the part taken therein by John R. Coons. On May 21, 1832 about seventy Indians under the command

of the renegade Simon Girty attacked a settlement near Ottawa, Illinois, killing and scalping fifteen persons, and taking prisoner two young women, Rachel and Sylvia Hall. A reward of \$2,000 was offered the Winnebagoes if they would secure the release of these girls. John R. Coons was one of a detachment sent out by the Winnebago agent, Colonel Henry Gratiot, in search of the young women. The captives were brought to the Mound Fort on June 3rd in a forlorn and famished condition, having traveled on horseback most of the time from their capture, their hunger stayed chiefly by dried beans. The Winnebagoes and the girls were feasted "sumptuously on a large beef stew". The next day Colonel Dodge, who was at Blue Mounds when the Hall girls were brought in, took them to Morrisons Grove where they were met by Colonel Gratiot. On June 5th the contingent returned to Gratiot's Grove.

Within a day or two John R. Coons had rejoined his company, which proceeded to Buffalo Grove (near Polo, Illinois) where five men had been ambushed by the Indians. The marauders were not found. On the 17th of June while Captain Stephenson's company was engaged in scouting, a band of Indians under Black Hawk himself was encountered near the headwaters of Yellow Creek. The Indians in superior numbers secured the advantage of position and could not be driven therefrom after three successive charges. Three of the company were killed in the action and the captain wounded.

On June 29th the murderers of two farmers near Sinsinawa Mound were pursued across the Mississippi. The company then marched to the Sugar River to join the rest of the Dodge command, other troops being sent to guard the mining region. On July 21st the main body of the Indians was overtaken at Wisconsin Heights. Colonel Dodge and his troops took an advanced center position and were under heavy fire for an hour. Upon the arrival of Colonel

Henry's command the Indian lines were charged and routed across the Wisconsin River, with a loss of sixty-eight killed against one casualty for the Americans.

The troops of Colonel Dodge, with worn out horses, were temporarily dismissed. Black Hawk was finally defeated on August 2nd on the Bad Axe River.

Of the services of John R. Coons, Seaton wrote for the "History of Grant County",

"Major Coons took an active part \* \* \* his services were untiring."

It has not been ascertained when nor under what circumstances the title of major was bestowed.

#### Permanent Peace.

After peace was restored Gratiot's Grove continued to prosper. The government as royalty for the lease of mining rights collected ten per cent, afterward reduced, of the value of the smelted lead. Smelters were licensed and required to post a bond of \$10,000 with the United States to insure their collection of the royalty and its turning over. In 1836 Colonel Gratiot visited Washington to promote a bill to establish Wisconsin as a territory. To show the value of the lead mines, it was pointed out that since 1826 he had paid to the government over \$60,000. Since the value of the lead smelted was ten times that sum, some idea is given of the amount of ore which had passed through the furnaces at Gratiot's Grove in ten years, even though the price had fallen from \$4.50 per hundred in 1827 to \$2.00 in 1829.

On July 10, 1833, a daughter was born to John and Sarah, and named after her mother.

It was in this year, and possibly before the birth of the infant Sarah, that the Coons family moved to a new home

near the mouth of Catfish Creek on the west side of the Mississippi, near Dubuque's settlement.

Gratiot's Grove dwindled in importance after the death of Colonel Gratiot in 1836. The mines near Shullsburg proving more profitable, that village grew and in 1845 was awarded the postoffice over the Grove. From thence on the community of Gratiot's Grove died a lingering death. Its site is now indicated by an inartistic sign nailed to a fence post.

Gratiot's Grove was in township 1 north and range 2 east. Shullsburg and White Oak Springs were and are in the same township. The present village of Gratiot is approximately ten miles east. So that the places mentioned herein may be more accurately seen in their relation to each other, there is inserted a sketch map taken largely from the Chandler map of 1829 and the Lapham map of 1845.

#### At Catfish Creek.

On the 28th day of September in the year 1788 at Prairie du Chien, Julien Dubuque received from the Fox Indians comprising five villages west of the Mississippi, the chief of which was at the mouth of the little Maquoketa, a writing to

“sell and abandon to him all the coast and contents of the mine discovered by the wife of Peosta \* \* \* and in case he shall find nothing within, he shall be free to search wherever he may think proper to do so \* \* \*”

The Spanish governor at New Orleans, Carondelet, approved this conveyance in 1796. Upon this title the heirs and assigns of Dubuque, including Henry Chouteau of St. Louis, claimed entire ownership of over 97,000 acres, from the “petite Maquanquitois” (little Maquoketa) to Tete



des Morts and three leagues westward from the Mississippi. This included all the lead region of Iowa. The United States did not recognize the claims of Dubuque's heirs and assigns, contending that Dubuque was granted only a personal privilege to mine and to prospect; and on January 5, 1833, the troubles of the Black Hawk War being over, the military detachment at Prairie du Chien was ordered to remove the settlers by force. The claimants and their tenants were driven off at the point of the bayonet and their dwellings burned.

The United States then began to grant mining and smelting rights to its citizens. One of the early applicants and grantees was John R. Coons. In 1833 he moved his family to a site near the mouth of Catfish Creek and under a smelter's grant erected a furnace for the refining of lead ore, duly posting his bond for \$10,000.

At thirty-three years of age John R. Coons had been a resident of four states, the father of seven children, and a veteran of Indian warfare. His economic endeavors had been as an employee of others. He now became an entrepreneur. The garrisoned home at Gratiot's Grove was left to establish residence elsewhere.

Before the departure an accident occurred which nearly left the family motherless. Son Henry B., aged four and a half years, left unattended for a moment, found a loaded gun in one of the recesses of the Grove home. The gun had been left by one of the defenders of the garrison. Playing soldier, the boy discharged the gun. The blast lodged in the bed just vacated by the mother. Henry B. remembered the incident vividly the rest of his years.

When the family moved to the Catfish, the City of Dubuque was not in being. It was not until the 2nd of July, 1836 that Congress passed an act creating the towns of Fort Madison, Burlington, Peru, Belleview and Dubuque

in the Territory of Wisconsin. At that time what is now Iowa constituted a part of the Territory of Wisconsin.

The friend of John R. Coons, J. W. Seaton of Potosi, is authority for the statement that as a smelter, John R. Coons enjoyed the confidence of the miners and did a lucrative business, the ten per cent rental of the United States amounting to thousands of dollars.

It is not definitely established whether the mother's namesake, Sarah, who was born July 10, 1833, first saw the light of day in Gratiot's Grove or on the Catfish. She was the seventh child born to John and Sarah. On July 12, 1834 Marie Louisa and unnamed twin brother were born.

The tenth and last recorded child, Eliza, was born January 16, 1836, probably at Catfish, though possibly at old Belmont where the family next resided.

Of the ten recorded children born to John and Sarah, only Henry B., Samuel Berry, and Eliza are known to have reached maturity. Henry Coons of Potosi, Uncle Henry, states that he remembers being told as a child that two brothers of his father, Henry B., were buried at Dubuque.

#### At Old Belmont.

The Indian right of occupancy having been forever extinguished by treaty following the Black Hawk War for all that territory south and east of the Wisconsin and Fox Rivers, a clamor arose for the organization of a territorial government separate from Michigan to which what is now Wisconsin was attached. On July 4, 1836 Wisconsin became a territory of the United States in its own right. As created the new territory extended from Lake Michigan to the Missouri River.

President Jackson appointed Colonel Henry Dodge Gov-

ernor. By virtue of his office, Dodge was also commander-in-chief of militia and superintendent of Indian affairs. His approval was required before any laws could take effect. The legislature was to hold its first session at such time and place as he might appoint. For all these responsibilities, Governor Dodge received an annual salary of \$2500 per year.

The first sale of public lands in the present state was held from the Mineral Point land office on November 1834, by which there was offered for sale all the land now comprising Grant County. On the 7th and 21st days of September 1835 there was brought into the market all the lands in the present Iowa and LaFayette Counties, and other land. Mineral bearing lands were excepted from such sales, the United States still clinging to its policy of leasing such lands.

On one of these days in September 1835, Sarah Coons was present. The far-sighted woman had travelled from Dubuque on horseback with her son Henry B. to enter land in the Eden of farming country. Her purchase was of land near Old Belmont, now Leslie, where the first capital of the territory was destined to be located. The land was purchased for \$1.25 an acre. The Hon. James Dolan of Platteville, Wisconsin, whose long practice at the bar has occasioned his examination of the title to most of the land in the Leslie neighborhood, states that nearly all of the land around Old Belmont was entered by James R. Gentry, the Moores, and John R. Coons.

The increment in value of this land is an interesting sidelight. In the years just preceding the World War improved farms in that locality sold for \$250 per acre. At the present time the market value is less than that by considerably more than one half. A far-sighted great grand-

daughter of Sarah has recently purchased a farm within sight of the Belmont Mound.

When Governor Dodge selected Old Belmont as the first territorial capital of Wisconsin, the rejoicing in the Coons household must have been exuberant. To that place the family moved. The father there conducted one of the largest dry goods stores north of St. Louis. He envisioned a large city, capital of a great commonwealth, built in part upon his subdivided land.

His was the first store in the new city, conducted under the name of Hooper, Peck, and Scales, of which firm John R. Coons was a partner. The first issue of the "Belmont Gazette" carried the advertisement of this store, largely featuring boots, shoes, groceries, and liquors.

In 1836 a postoffice was established by Act of Congress under the name of Belle Monte; and John R. Coons was appointed postmaster. The mail was received at and delivered from the store. A daily line of four-horse coaches carried passengers and mail from Galena to Portage on the Blue Mound and Portage City Military Route.

The territorial legislature assembled October 25, 1836. A railroad was chartered to run from the Mississippi to Dodgeville through Belmont and Mineral Point. (It was never constructed. The first railroad into the lead territory reached Galena from Chicago in 1854.)

Another act chartered the Miners' bank of the newly founded Dubuque, and the Bank of Mineral Point.

The principal question of the session was the location of the permanent seat of government. Numerous speculators were in attendance with beautiful maps of existing and prospective cities. Dubuque, Fond du Lac, Portage, Helena, Racine, Platteville, Belmont, Cassville, Green Bay, Peru, Mineral Point, and others were considered. Madison, a

paper city, was chosen. Madison town lots in large numbers were freely distributed to members of the legislature to influence their votes. Those voting against the choice were largely from the mining region.

The soaring hopes of John and Sarah were blighted by the strangulation of the young city. They sold their land and business interests and moved to new fields.

The territorial census of 1836 lists John R. Coonce as a resident of the then Iowa\* County, apparently in Pickatolik (Pecatonica) township. The household is enumerated as numbering eight. This does not necessarily mean that six children were then living for a household was then considered as including all employees.

#### At Potosi.

One act of the territorial legislative session at Old Belmont was to establish Grant\* county with its present boundaries. The first white settlement in this county was a temporary occupation in 1822 near the mouth of the Grant River where the town of Oceola was afterward located, and hard by the Indian village of Pascanaus. In 1829 Tom Hymer, camping for the night near a fallen tree, discovered lead in the torn earth. This was approximately where St. Thomas Catholic Church now stands in Potosi.

In 1832 Willis St. John and Isaac Whitaker were wandering home after the Battle of Bad Axe. In what the Indians called Snake Hollow because of its narrow, twisting path, these men made further discoveries of lead. Three settlements grew up along the length of this narrow valley of what is now known as Potosi Creek. Increase Allen Lapham in his book, "Wisconsin", first published in 1845,

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\* Named from the Indian tribe which once inhabited the region.

\* Named from its principal river, in turn named from one Grant, a trapper, who had his cabin on its bank.

states that improvements commenced in this valley in 1836. The valley is three miles long and varies from 100 to 300 yards in width.

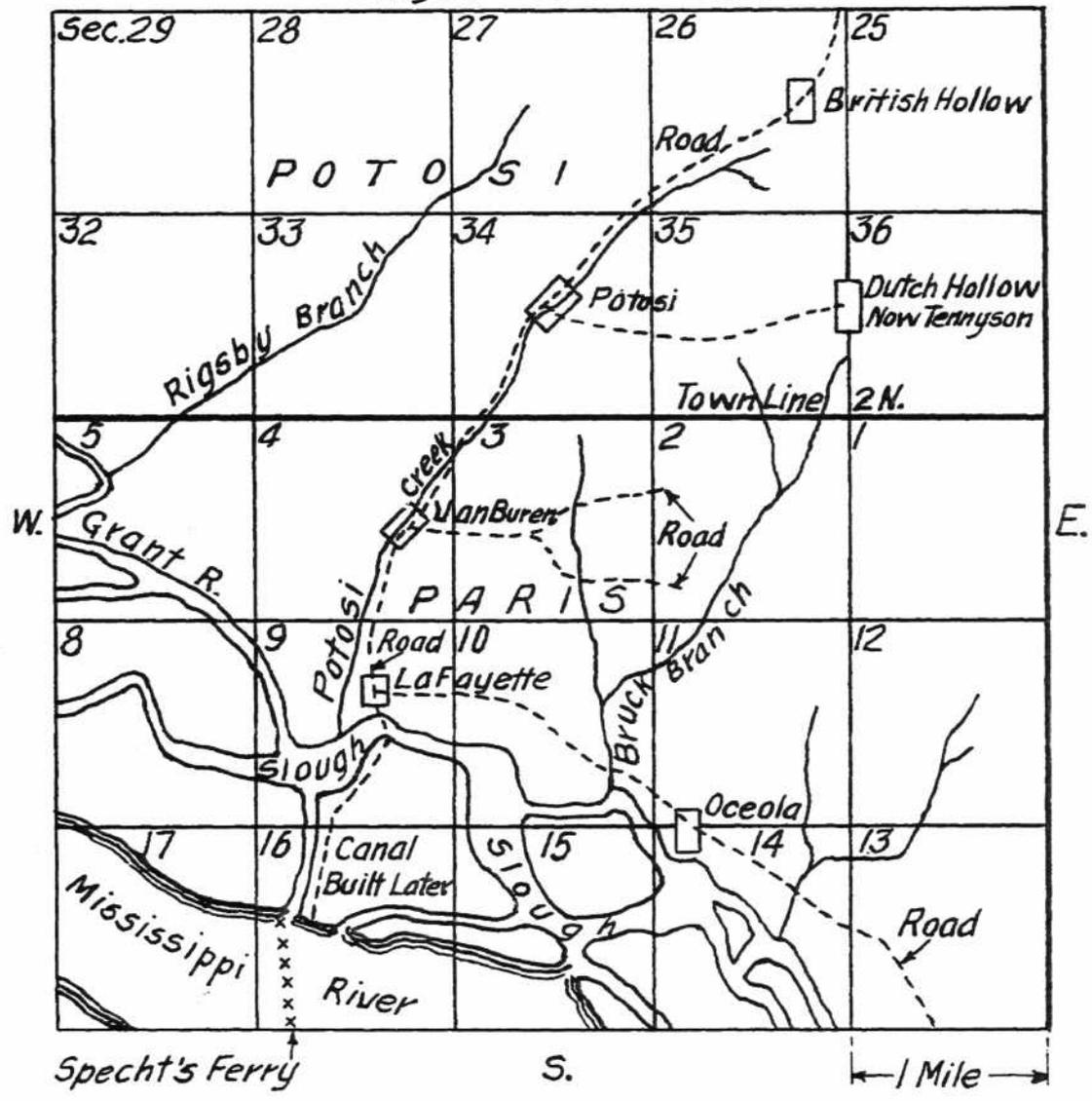
For many years this valley was considered as the most important place on the Mississippi in the mineral country. A grant of one section of land was made by Congress in 1844 to improve the channel of the Grant River and to connect it more directly with the Mississippi at the mouth of the valley. The section selected was number 34 in town 3 N. range 3 W., wherein was the village of Snake Hollow or Potosi. Pre-emption rights were granted to settlers and occupants and the land sold for the building of the canal, which was completed within two or three years.

There is inserted herein a sketch map of parts of the townships of Potosi and Paris in Grant county designed to show the location of the snake-shaped hollow and the settlements therein of the early mining days. Each block is a section a mile square. Oceola, Van Buren, Potosi, LaFayette, British Hollow, and Tennyson are shown. The map is taken from the Lapham map of 1845 and an old original silk fabric map possessed by Henry B. Coons and perhaps his father, John R.

The "History of Grant County", 1881, recites that to the village of La Fayette in 1837 prominent arrivals were John R. Coons and W. A. Coons. These men were apparently brothers. Later W. A. Coons moved to LaSalle and Lincoln, Illinois, where his wife, Catherine, died in 1875. The census of territorial Wisconsin in 1836 does not record a W. A. Coons in the lead region. It is likely that W. A. Coons came from Kentucky or Missouri to join his brother. Seaton gives the date of arrival of John R. Coons as 1836.

John and Sarah established their new and fifth home at LaFayette at the mouth of the valley, approximately where

N.  
Range 3 West of 4th P.M.



Parts of the Towns of Paris and Potosi in Grant County, Wisconsin, in the early mining days.

the Potosi station on the Burlington railroad is now located. There they built the first frame building in the Hollow, shipping the material from Cincinnati by way of the Ohio, Mississippi, and Grant Rivers. Bright commercial prospects were on the horizon. A railroad had been chartered to have its terminus in the Hollow. Some of the richest diggings of the mineral country were near. Even if the railroad failed to materialize, water transportation was good.

The firm of Coons, Wooley & Co. was established as a branch of the parent house of Hooper, Peck, and Scales of Galena. Into the new frame building were placed staple groceries, dry goods, and liquors. "Its internal arrangements were a marvel of beauty and elegance". (Seaton.)

The development of La Fayette spelled the doom of Oceola; after 1837 the rivals of LaFayette were Van Buren, approximately where the Potosi Brewery now stands, and Snake Hollow (now Potosi) at the head of the valley. The selection of Van Buren for a post office in 1838 furnished a disappointment. This was offset by the opening of a school established in a log cabin in La Fayette in 1838.

The first teacher was Cornelius Kennedy, a soldier of the Revolutionary War, who conducted his classes with military discipline. Among his pupils when school opened were Henry B. Coons, age 9; Samuel Berry Coons, age 7; and John and Mary Coons. The two latter were no doubt the children of W. A. Coons.

The Warren Lodge of Ancient York Masons was organized May 2, 1844 in the rooms above the Coons-Wooley store. Likewise, in this room in 1840 was organized the Presbyterian (now Congregational) Church of Potosi. To this church the Major was a contributor.

In the year 1845 the village was stirred by the challenge

to and acceptance of a duel. The principals were one Latimer, an Englishman, and White, from Kentucky. At the appointed time and place the principals and their seconds appeared; but no blood was shed, for through the good offices of Major Coons, an honorable settlement was reached.

The building of the canal from the Grant to the Mississippi beginning in 1844 facilitated the transportation of lead and supplies; but it also gave material boost to the village, Potosi, at the head of the Hollow, for to finance the building of the canal, land in that section, 34, theretofore reserved from entry as mineral land, was offered for sale.

At this time (1846-47) the country was overrun with depreciated currency and flooded with "wildcat" bank notes. The credit system predicated upon the worthless currency was deflated and collapsed. In this debacle the firm of Coons, Wooley & Co., and the parent, Hooper, Peck & Scales of Galena, failed to weather the storm. From then on Major Coons was a penniless man. Riches were within his grasp at Belmont and La Fayette, but fortune failed him; and he became the victim of the selfish predators who bribed the territorial legislature in 1836 to remove the capitol to Madison, and of unscrupulous bankers.

The once great store still stood in 1879 doing duty as a horse stable upon the farm of Nick Bonn.

After the disaster of the late forties, the hardships of pioneer life, and the responsibilities of many children, it is not surprising that John and Sarah, and perhaps some of their children as well, fell victim to the epidemics of malaria and cholera that swept the Valley in 1851 and 1852. On March 18, 1851, at the age of 51, the records of Sarah were certified to the Great Master. She lies buried in a forgotten cemetery in a town, Oceola, which can no longer be found upon a map.

Her husband followed her to the same resting place on July 25, 1852, at the age of 52 years.

Their burial place is a lonely dell, but not inappropriate. They see beneath them the hurrying Zephyr trains and observe the clearing of all timber on the Grant Sloughs, and, perchance, comfort each other with a pitying observation about the times and trends in which their descendants live.

Sarah was a remarkable woman. Her pioneer spirit, her courage, and her vigor have been made apparent. She was an artist of no mean ability; and even after her marriage executed commissions in painting and in gilding for friends in St. Louis.

In "History of La Fayette County" she is described as of amiable disposition, a woman of high Christian virtue, and possessed with overflowing benevolence and charity.